

# FCC Consumer Tip Sheet

## *Lifeline Program & New Reforms*

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### **Background**

The federal Universal Service Fund (USF) supports the **Lifeline / Link Up program**, which has helped low-income consumers afford phone service since 1984. The Federal Communications Commission with the help of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) administers the USF.

### **What has changed?**

To help ensure that Lifeline can reach as many low-income consumers as possible, the FCC has determined that eligible consumers can only receive one Lifeline-subsidized phone service.

### **What Do I Do If I Have More Than One Lifeline Phone Service?**

If you know that you are receiving two Lifeline benefits, you should immediately contact one of the providers to de-enroll from one of the Lifeline programs. Under FCC rules, you may only be enrolled in a single Lifeline program.

USAC—the group that administers the Lifeline program for the government—may notify you that you are enrolled in two programs and the letter will explain that you are permitted to have one Lifeline-subsidized phone service. The letter will explain that:

- You will have at least 30 days to choose which subsidized phone service to keep.
- The company or companies not chosen by you must de-enroll you from Lifeline within five days after being notified of your choice by USAC.
- However, to make sure the company you do not choose does not charge you higher rates that you are not expecting, you must call the phone company you do not want as your Lifeline provider to either disconnect service entirely or to discuss an appropriate non-Lifeline rate plan with the company.
- At the end of the process, you will have no more than one Lifeline-subsidized phone service.

### **How Do I Qualify for Lifeline Discounts?**

The Lifeline program is available to qualifying consumers in every state, territory, and commonwealth. Eligibility criteria vary by state. States that have their own Lifeline program may have their own criteria. For states that rely solely on the federal Lifeline and Link-Up program eligibility criteria, subscribers must either have an income that is at or below 135% of the federal Poverty Guidelines, or participate in one of the following assistance programs:

- Medicaid,
- Food Stamps,
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI),
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8),
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP),
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), or
- The National School Lunch Program's Free Lunch Program.

### **For More Information**

For information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau Web site at <http://www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau>, or contact the

FCC's Consumer Center by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau  
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division  
445 12th Street, SW Washington, D.C. 20554

You can also view fact sheets on other FCC Universal Service programs on the FCC Web site.

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